

DESCRIPTION

EXHAUST PURIFYING APPARATUS AND EXHAUST PURIFYING METHOD FOR
INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE

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TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an exhaust purifying
apparatus and an exhaust purifying method for an internal
10 combustion engine on a vehicle, which apparatus performs
heating control for increasing the temperature of an exhaust
purification catalyst by adding fuel to the catalyst.

BACKGROUND ART

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As disclosed in Japanese Laid-Open Patent Publication No.
5-44434, a typical exhaust purifying apparatus applied to an
internal combustion engine on a vehicle includes an exhaust
purification catalyst located in an exhaust system. The
20 exhaust purification catalyst functions to trap particulate
matter (PM) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) contained in exhaust gas.

Such an exhaust purifying apparatus estimates the amount
of particulate matter accumulated in an exhaust purification
25 catalyst based on the operation state of an engine. When the
amount of the accumulated particulate matter is no less than a
permissible value, the apparatus performs heating control to
regenerate the catalyst, the performance of which has been
degraded due to clogging of particulate matter. In the
30 heating control, the apparatus supplies fuel to the exhaust
purification catalyst to heat the catalyst, and uses the heat
to burn and remove particulate matter accumulated in the
exhaust purification catalyst.

35 Performing the heating control is known to cause the

following problems. That is, depending on the operation state of the engine, the exhaust temperature is decreased, which deactivates the catalyst. This hampers oxidation of fuel supplied to the catalyst. Continuation of supply of fuel to
5 the exhaust purification catalyst in a deactivated state causes a great amount of fuel to collect on the surface of the catalyst. This in turn increases the amount of accumulated particulate matter. Also, since some of the fuel supplied to the exhaust purification catalyst passes through the catalyst
10 and is emitted, the properties of exhaust gas are degraded.

Not only for burning and removing particulate matter, the heating control is performed, for example, for regenerating a catalyst that has been poisoned with sulfur
15 contained in exhaust gas. When the heating control is performed for releasing sulfur, if the catalyst is deactivated, the sulfur releasing cannot be completed, and thus, the above described problem is caused.

20 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is an objective of the present invention to provide an exhaust gas purifying apparatus and an exhaust purifying method, which eliminate problems due to deactivation
25 of an exhaust purification catalyst during the heating control, for an internal combustion engine on a vehicle.

To achieve the foregoing and other objectives and in accordance with the purpose of the invention, an exhaust
30 purifying apparatus for an internal combustion engine on a vehicle is provided. The apparatus has a regeneration control section. The regeneration control section controls regeneration of an exhaust purification catalyst through heating control, in which fuel is supplied to the exhaust
35 purification catalyst, thereby increasing a bed temperature of

the catalyst. The apparatus further includes a determining section that determining whether the vehicle is driving downhill. The regeneration control section suspends the heating control when the determining section determines that
5 the vehicle is driving downhill.

The present invention also provides an exhaust purifying method for an internal combustion engine on a vehicle. The method includes: supplying fuel to an exhaust purification
10 catalyst to increase a bed temperature of the catalyst, thereby regenerating the exhaust purification catalyst; determining whether the vehicle is driving downhill; and suspending the supply of fuel to the exhaust purification catalyst when the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an internal combustion engine on a vehicle to which a first embodiment of
20 the present invention is applied;

Fig. 2 is a timing chart showing an example of processes related to a PM elimination control mode of the first embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart showing a suspending process of
25 the first embodiment;

Fig. 4 is a flowchart showing a process for turning on a downhill flag of the first embodiment;

Fig. 5 is a timing chart including sections (a) to (d), which show an example of a control of the downhill flag of the
30 first embodiment;

Fig. 6 is a flowchart showing a process for turning off a downhill flag of the first embodiment;

Fig. 7 is a flowchart showing a suspending process according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

35 Fig. 8 is a flowchart showing a process for determining

deactivation according to the second embodiment; and

Fig. 9 is a timing chart including sections (a) to (c), which show an example of the suspending process according to the second embodiment.

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BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Hereinafter, an exhaust purifying apparatus for an internal combustion engine 2 on a vehicle according to a first
10 embodiment of the present invention will be described.

Fig. 1 illustrates the configuration of the internal combustion engine 2 to which the exhaust purifying apparatus according to this embodiment is applied. The internal
15 combustion engine 2 is mounted on a vehicle such as an automobile, and functions as a power source.

The engine 2 has cylinders. In this embodiment, the number of the cylinders is four, and the cylinders are denoted
20 as #1, #2, #3, and #4. A combustion chamber 4 of each of the cylinders #1 to #4 includes an intake port 8, which is opened and closed by an intake valve 6. The combustion chambers 4 are connected to a surge tank 12 via the intake ports 8 and an intake manifold 10. The surge tank 12 is connected to an
25 intercooler 14 and an outlet of a supercharger with an intake passage 13. In this embodiment, the supercharger is a compressor 16a of an exhaust turbocharger 16. An inlet of the compressor 16a is connected to an air cleaner 18. An exhaust gas recirculation (hereinafter, referred to as EGR) passage 20
30 is connected to the surge tank 12. Specifically, an EGR gas supply port 20a of the EGR passage 20 opens to the surge tank 12. A throttle valve 22 is located in a section of the intake passage 13 between the surge tank 12 and the intercooler 14. An intake flow rate sensor 24 and an intake temperature sensor
35 26 are located in a section between the compressor 16a and the

air cleaner 18.

5 The combustion chamber 4 of each of the cylinders #1 to #4 includes an exhaust gas port 30, which is opened and closed by an exhaust gas valve 28. The combustion chambers 4 are connected to an inlet of an exhaust turbine 16b via the exhaust gas ports 30 and an exhaust manifold 32. An outlet of the exhaust turbine 16b is connected to an exhaust passage 34. The exhaust turbine 16b draws exhaust gas from a section of
10 the exhaust manifold 32 that corresponds to the side of the fourth cylinder #4.

15 Three catalytic converters 36, 38, 40 each containing an exhaust purification catalyst are located in the exhaust passage 34. The first catalytic converter 36 located at the most upstream section contains a NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a. When exhaust gas is an oxidizing atmosphere (lean) during a normal operation of the engine 2, the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a stores NOx. When the exhaust
20 gas is a reducing atmosphere (stoichiometric or lower air-fuel ratio), NOx that has been stored in the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a is released as NO and reduced with hydrocarbon and carbon oxide contained in exhaust gas. NOx is removed in this manner.

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A second catalytic converter 38 containing a filter 38a is located at the second position from the most upstream side. The filter 38a has a monolithic wall. The wall has pores through which exhaust gas passes. The areas about the pores
30 of the exhaust filter 38a are coated with a layer of a NOx storage reduction catalyst. Therefore, the NOx storage reduction catalyst functions as an exhaust purification catalyst to remove NOx as described above. Further, the filter wall traps particulate matter in exhaust gas. Thus,
35 active oxygen, which is generated in a high-temperature

oxidizing atmosphere when NO_x is stored, starts oxidizing particulate matter. Further, ambient excessive oxygen oxidizes the entire particulate matter. Accordingly, particulate matter is removed at the same time as NO_x is removed.

A third catalytic converter 40 is located in the most downstream section. The third catalytic converter 40 contains an oxidation catalyst 40a, which oxidizes and purifies hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide in exhaust gas to purify the exhaust gas.

A first exhaust temperature sensor 44 is located between the NO_x storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a. A second exhaust temperature sensor 46 and an air-fuel ratio sensor 48 are located between the filter 38a and the oxidation catalyst 40a. The second exhaust temperature sensor 46 is closer to the filter 38a than the oxidation catalyst 40a. The air-fuel ratio sensor 48 is located closer to the oxidation catalyst 40a than the filter 38a. The air-fuel ratio sensor 48 includes a solid electrolyte and detects the air-fuel ratio of exhaust gas based on components of the exhaust gas. The air-fuel ratio sensor 48 outputs a voltage signal in proportion to the detected air-fuel ratio. The first exhaust temperature sensor 44 detects an exhaust temperature T_i at the corresponding position. Likewise, the second exhaust temperature sensor 46 detects an exhaust temperature T_o at the corresponding position.

Pipes of a differential pressure sensor 50 are connected to a section upstream of the filter 38a and a section downstream of the filter 38a. The differential pressure sensor 50 detects the pressure difference ΔP between the sections upstream and downstream of the filter 38a, thereby detecting the degree of clogging of the filter 38a. The

degree of clogging represents the degree of accumulation of particulate matter in the filter 38a.

An EGR gas intake port 20b of the EGR passage 20 is provided in the exhaust manifold 32. The EGR gas intake port 20b is open at a section that corresponds to the side of the first cylinder #1, which is opposite to the side of the fourth cylinder #4, at which the exhaust turbine 16b introduces exhaust gas.

An EGR catalyst 52 is located in the EGR passage 20. The EGR catalyst 52 reforms EGR gas from the EGR gas intake port 20b of the EGR passage 20. Also, an EGR cooler 54 for cooling EGR gas is located in the EGR passage 20. The EGR catalyst 52 also functions to prevent clogging of the EGR cooler 54. An EGR valve 56 is located upstream of the EGR gas supply port 20a. The opening degree of the EGR valve 56 is changed to adjust the amount of EGR gas supplied from the EGR gas supply port 20a to the intake system.

Each of the cylinders #1 to #4 is provided with a fuel injection valve 58 that directly injects fuel into the corresponding combustion chamber 4. The fuel injection valves 58 are connected to a common rail 60 with fuel supply pipes 58a. A variable displacement fuel pump 62 supplies fuel to the common rail 60. High pressure fuel supplied from the fuel pump 62 to the common rail 60 is distributed to the fuel injection valves 58 through the fuel supply pipes 58a. A fuel pressure sensor 64 for detecting the pressure of fuel is attached to the common rail 60.

Further, the fuel pump 62 also supplies low pressure fuel to a fuel adding valve 68 through a fuel supply pipe 66. The fuel adding valve 68 is provided in the exhaust gas port 30 of the fourth cylinder #4 and injects fuel toward the

exhaust turbine 16b. In this manner, the fuel adding valve 68 adds fuel to exhaust gas. A catalyst control mode, which is described below, is executed by such addition of fuel.

5 An electronic control unit (ECU) 70 is mainly composed of a digital computer having a CPU, a ROM, and a RAM, and drive circuits for driving other devices. In this embodiment, the ECU 70 functions as a regeneration control section and a determining section. As the regeneration control section, the
10 ECU 70 controls regeneration of the exhaust purification catalysts. As the determining section, the ECU 70 determines whether the vehicle is driving downhill.

 The ECU 70 reads signals from the intake flow rate
15 sensor 24, the intake temperature sensor 26, the first exhaust temperature sensor 44, the second exhaust temperature sensor 46, the air-fuel ratio sensor 48, the differential pressure sensor 50, an EGR opening degree sensor in the EGR valve 56, the fuel pressure sensor 64, and a throttle opening degree
20 sensor 22a. Further, the ECU 70 reads signals from an acceleration pedal sensor 74 that detects the depression degree of an acceleration pedal 72 (acceleration opening degree ACCP), and a coolant temperature sensor 76 that detects the temperature THW of coolant of the engine 2. Also, the ECU
25 70 reads signals from an engine speed sensor 80 that detects the rotation speed NE of a crankshaft 78, a cylinder distinguishing sensor 82 that distinguishes cylinders by detecting the rotation phase of the crankshaft 78 or the rotation phase of the intake cams, and a vehicle speed sensor
30 84 that detects the speed SPD of the vehicle.

 Based on the operation state of the engine 2 obtained from these signals, the ECU 70 controls the amount and the timing of fuel injection by the fuel injection valve 58. The
35 fuel injection amount control includes "fuel cutoff" control

for suspending fuel injection when, for example, the vehicle is decelerating. Further, the ECU 70 controls the opening degree of the EGR valve 56, the throttle opening degree with the motor 22b, and the displacement of the fuel pump 62. Also, the ECU 70 executes catalyst control, such as PM elimination control, sulfur release control and NOx reduction control, and other controls by controlling the opening degree of the fuel adding valve 68.

The ECU 70 selects one of a normal combustion mode and a low temperature combustion mode according to the operating condition. The low temperature combustion mode refers to a combustion mode in which an EGR opening degree map for the low temperature combustion mode is used for recirculating a large amount of exhaust gas (increasing the amount of EGR) to slow down the increase of the combustion temperature, thereby simultaneously reducing NOx and smoke. In the low temperature combustion mode is executed in a low load, low-to-middle rotation speed region, and air-fuel ratio feedback control is performed by adjusting the throttle opening degree TA based on the air-fuel ratio AF detected by the air-fuel ratio sensor 48. The other combustion mode is the normal combustion mode, in which a normal EGR control (including a case where no EGR is executed) is performed using an EGR opening degree map for the normal combustion mode.

The ECU 70 performs four catalyst control modes, which are modes for controlling the catalysts. The catalyst control modes include a PM elimination control mode, a sulfur release control mode, a NOx reduction control mode, and a normal control mode.

In the PM elimination control mode, particulate matter deposited on the filter 38a in the second catalytic converter 38 is heated and burned. The particulate matter is then

converted into CO₂ and H₂O and discharged. In this mode, fuel is added to exhaust gas to generate heat by oxidizing fuel in the exhaust gas or the catalysts so that the catalyst bed temperature is increased, for example, to 600 to 700°C. Also, 5 particulate matter around the catalysts is burned. The manner in which this mode is executed will be discussed below.

In the sulfur release control mode, if the NO_x storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a are poisoned with 10 sulfur and the NO_x storage capacity is lowered, sulfur components are released from the catalyst 36a and the filter 38a so that the catalyst 36a and the filter 38a are restored from the sulfur poisoning. In this mode, sulfur temperature increase control is performed in which addition of fuel from 15 the fuel adding valve 68 is repeated so that the catalyst bed temperature is increased (for example, to 650°C). Further, an air-fuel ratio lowering control is performed in which the catalyst bed temperature is maintained high by intermittently adding fuel to exhaust gas by the fuel adding valve, and the 20 air-fuel ratio is changed to the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio or a value slightly lower than the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio. In this embodiment, the air-fuel ratio is richened to be a value slightly less than the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio. The air-fuel ration lowering control is considered to 25 be a type of heating control since fuel addition is executed for maintaining the catalyst bed temperature high. As in the other modes, an after injection is performed by the fuel injection valve 58 in this mode in some cases. The after injection refers to fuel injection to the combustion chambers 30 4 during the expansion stroke and the exhaust stroke.

In the NO_x reduction control mode, NO_x stored in the NO_x storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a is reduced to N₂, CO₂, and H₂O and emitted. In this mode, addition of 35 fuel from the fuel adding valve 68 is intermittently performed

at a relatively long interval so that the catalyst bed temperature becomes relatively low (for example, to a temperature in a range from 250°C to 500°C). Accordingly, the air-fuel ratio is lowered to or below the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio.

A state where none of the PM elimination control mode, the sulfur release control mode, and the NOx reduction control mode is being executed corresponds to the normal control mode, in which addition of fuel from the fuel adding valve 68 and the after injection by the fuel injection valve 58 are not performed.

Next, processes related to the PM elimination control mode among the processes executed by the ECU 70 will be described.

If a large amount of fuel is added to exhaust gas at a time to burn particulate matter accumulated in the exhaust purification catalysts, the temperature of the catalysts is suddenly increased, which causes thermal degradation of the catalysts. On the other hand, although a reduced amount of added fuel prevents thermal degradation of the catalysts, particulate matter accumulated in the catalysts will remain unburned.

Therefore, as shown in the timing chart of Fig. 2, first heating control is performed in the PM elimination control mode. In the first heating control, a relatively small amount of fuel is added to exhaust gas in a period from t11 to t12, thereby minimizing increase of the temperature, while reducing the total amount of particulate matter accumulated in the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a. Thereafter, second heating control is performed in which the amount of fuel added to exhaust gas is more than that in the first

heating control in a period from t12 to t13. This completely
burns particulate matter accumulated in the NOx storage
reduction catalyst 36a. In this mode also, fuel is added to
exhaust gas by addition from the fuel adding valve 68 or the
5 after injection by the fuel injection valve 58.

The PM elimination control is started on the condition
that the amount of particulate matter accumulated in the NOx
storage reduction catalyst 36a (estimated accumulated amount
10 PMsm), which is computed based on the engine operation state,
reaches a reference value PMstart (time t11), and is completed
when the second heating control is ended (time t13). In the
first heating control, fuel is repeatedly added to exhaust gas
at an air-fuel ratio higher than the stoichiometric air-fuel
15 ratio, so that the catalyst bed temperature is increased. In
the second heating control, the intermittent addition of fuel
permits a process to be repeatedly executed in which the air-
fuel ratio is set to the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio or an
air-fuel ratio slightly less than the stoichiometric air-fuel
20 ratio with periods of no fuel addition between the executions.
In this embodiment, the air-fuel ratio is richened to be a
value slightly less than the stoichiometric air-fuel ratio.

When the vehicle is driving downhill, the engine load is
25 reduced and the exhaust temperature is lowered accordingly.
Also, the relative wind significantly decreases the catalyst
bed temperature. It is therefore highly likely that the
exhaust purification catalysts will be deactivated.

30 With this being the case, the following process is
executed in this embodiment when the ECU 70 determines that
the vehicle is driving downhill (positive outcome at step
S100) as shown in the flowchart of Fig. 3. That is, if the
processes related to the PM elimination control (the first and
35 second heating control) or the processes related to the sulfur

release control (sulfur temperature increase control and the air-fuel ratio lowering control) are being executed, the processes are suspended at step S102. If the processes are requested to be started, the request is canceled at step S102.

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Also, when the processes are suspended, if the ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is not driving downhill (negative outcome at step S100), the processes are resumed (step S106) on the condition that resumption requirements are satisfied (positive outcome at step S104). The resumption requirements include that the exhaust purification catalysts are determined not to be deactivated. For example, the exhaust purification catalysts are determined not to be deactivated when the catalyst bed temperature is sufficient for burning fuel collected on the exhaust purification catalysts, and when the engine operation state is likely to increase to the sufficient temperature, for example, after the engine has been operated for a predetermined period at a high load.

20 The series of processes shown in the flowchart of Fig. 3 is executed by the ECU 70 at predetermined intervals. The ECU 70 determines whether vehicle is driving downhill or not at step 100 based on whether a downhill flag, which will be discussed below, is ON or OFF.

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Hereinafter, processes related to the downhill flag will be described. The flowchart of Fig. 4 shows a procedure for turning on the downhill flag. The series of processes shown in the flowchart of Fig. 4 is executed by the ECU 70 at predetermined intervals.

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First, whether the following requirements are both satisfied is determined at step S200.

(1) The vehicle speed SPD is equal to or more than a predetermined speed.

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(2) The fuel injection amount is zero, or the fuel cutoff control is being executed.

If these requirements are both satisfied (positive
5 outcome at step S200), the vehicle is determined to be driving
downhill, and a count value Cs of a downhill counter is
incremented at step S202. When the procedure is repeatedly
executed and the count value Cs reaches a predetermined value
(positive outcome at step S204), the downhill flag is turned
10 on at step S206.

The count value Cs is cleared at step S212 when the
above listed requirements are not satisfied (negative outcome
at step S200). However, even if the requirements are not
15 satisfied, the count value Cs is not cleared when the fuel
injection amount is equal to or more than a predetermined
amount (positive outcome at step S208), and the state of the
requirements being not satisfied has lasted for a period that
is less than a predetermined time (negative outcome at step
20 S210). Even if the vehicle is driving downhill, fuel
injection is temporally executed due to gear shift. In such a
case, the count value Cs is maintained without being cleared.

As shown in the timing chart of Fig. 5, when the vehicle
25 starts driving downhill at time t21, the duration of driving
downhill starts being measured with the downhill counter.
When the measured time reaches the predetermined time at time
t22, the downhill flag is turned on. Then, when the ECU 70
determines that the vehicle is driving downhill based on the
30 fact that the downhill flag is ON at step S100 of Fig. 3, the
processes related to the PM elimination control and the
processes related to the sulfur release control are suspended
as described above.

35 The flowchart of Fig. 6 shows procedure for turning off

the downhill flag. The series of processes shown in the flowchart of Fig. 6 is executed by the ECU 70 at predetermined intervals.

5 First, whether the fuel injection amount is no less than a predetermined amount is determined at step S300. If the fuel injection amount is no less than the predetermined amount (positive outcome at step S300), the vehicle is determined not to be driving downhill, and a non-downhill count value Cn is
10 incremented at step S302. When the procedure is repeatedly executed and the count value Cn reaches a predetermined value (positive outcome at step S304), the downhill flag is turned off at step S306.

15 The count value Cn is cleared at step S310 when the fuel injection amount is maintained below the predetermined amount (negative outcome at step S300) and this state lasts for a predetermined time or longer (positive outcome at step S308). That is, even if the fuel injection amount is less than the
20 predetermined amount, the count value Cn is not cleared unless the duration is less than the predetermined time (negative outcome at step S308). Even if the vehicle is not driving downhill, the fuel cutoff control can be executed due to operation of the brake or the fuel injection amount can be
25 significantly reduced. In such a case, the count value Cn is maintained without being cleared.

As shown in Fig. 5, when the vehicle stops driving downhill at time t23, the duration of non-downhill driving
30 starts being measured with a non-downhill counter. When the measured time reaches a predetermined time at time t24, the downhill flag is turned OFF. Then, when the ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is not driving downhill based on the fact that the downhill flag is OFF at step S100 of Fig. 3, the
35 suspended processes are resumed at step S106 on the condition

that the above listed resumption requirements are satisfied
(positive outcome at step S104).

5 The above described embodiment has the following
advantages.

10 (1) The ECU 70 determines whether the vehicle is driving
downhill. When the vehicle is determined to be driving
downhill, the processes related to the PM elimination control
and the processes related to the sulfur release control are
suspended. Accordingly, when the vehicle is driving downhill,
the processes are suspended. In other words, the processes
are suspended when the engine load is reduced and the exhaust
temperature is lowered accordingly, and the relative wind
15 significantly decreases the catalyst bed temperature and it is
therefore highly likely that the exhaust purification
catalysts will be deactivated. Thus, under circumstances
where oxidation of fuel is insufficient, fuel is not supplied
to the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a,
20 and adverse influences caused by fuel supply are reliably
avoided.

25 It is also possible to directly detect the catalyst bed
temperature and determine deactivation of the exhaust
purification catalysts based on the catalyst bed temperature.
However, in such a configuration, even if the fuel supply from
the fuel adding valve 68 is suspended after a drop of the
catalyst bed temperature is detected, the fuel that has been
injected until then will continue to be supplied to the NOx
30 storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a for a
certain period of time. In contrast to this, a drop of the
exhaust temperature and even deactivation of the exhaust
purification catalysts due to the temperature drop are
predicted based on the driving state of the vehicle in this
35 embodiment. Thus, disadvantages caused by adding fuel to the

NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a and the filter 38a when the catalyst 36a and the filter 38a are deactivated are avoided.

(2) The ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is driving downhill when the fuel cutoff control is being executed. Therefore, when the fuel cutoff control is being executed, the disadvantages are reliably avoided. In other words, the disadvantages are avoided when there is no engine combustion heat and the catalyst bed temperature abruptly drops accordingly, and there is a possibility that the catalysts are deactivated in a short time compared to the state where the engine is idling.

(3) The processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are suspended only when a predetermined period has elapsed since when the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill. In other words, the processes are suspended only when there is a high possibility that the exhaust purification catalysts are deactivated. Therefore, sufficient period for the processes are obtained in most of the cases, while avoiding the disadvantages. Further, even if the fuel injection amount during non-downhill driving temporarily becomes equal to that of downhill driving because of shifting of gears or operation of the brake, the ECU 70 is prevented from erroneously determining that the vehicle is driving downhill. That is, the determination accuracy of the ECU 70 is improved.

(4) When the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are suspended based on the determination of the ECU 70 that the vehicle is driving downhill, the processes are resumed if the ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is determined to not to be driving downhill. This ensures that the processes are executed when the vehicle stops driving

downhill.

(5) Also, the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are resumed only when a predetermined period has elapsed since when the vehicle is determined not to be driving downhill. Thus, the processes are resumed when the catalyst bed temperature has been increased after the vehicle stops driving downhill. The processes are therefore resumed under favorable conditions.

Hereinafter, an exhaust purifying apparatus for an internal combustion engine on a vehicle according to a second embodiment of the present invention will be described.

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The second embodiment is different from the first embodiment in the manner by which the processes related to the PM elimination control and the process related to the sulfur release control are suspended.

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The flowchart of Fig. 7 shows a procedure for suspending the processes. The series of processes shown in the flowchart of Fig. 7 is executed by the ECU 70 at predetermined intervals. Since steps S100 to S106 of Fig. 7 are the same as steps S100 to S106 in the flowchart according to the first embodiment shown in Fig. 3, the same numerals are used for the steps of Fig. 7 and the explanations are omitted.

In the flowchart of Fig. 7, the ECU 70 first determines at step S100 whether the vehicle is driving downhill. When the ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is driving downhill (positive outcome at step S100), whether this determination has continued for a predetermined period is determined at step S400. Specifically, whether the downhill flag has been on for the predetermined period is determined.

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If the determination that the vehicle is driving downhill has not continued for the predetermined period (negative outcome at step S400), whether the exhaust purification catalysts are deactivated is determined (deactivation determination) at step S402.

If the exhaust purification catalysts are not determined to be deactivated (negative outcome at step S404), the processes related to the PM elimination control and the process related to the sulfur release control are not suspended but continued. On the other hand, if the exhaust purification catalysts are determined to be deactivated (positive outcome at step S404), the processes are suspended at step S102 in the manner described above.

Thereafter, when the procedure is repeatedly executed and the duration of the on state of the downhill flag reaches the predetermined period (positive outcome at step S400), the processes are suspended at step S102 without determining the deactivation.

Hereinafter, a specific procedure of the deactivation determination will be described with reference to the flowchart of Fig. 8. The series of processes shown in the flowchart of Fig. 8 is executed by the ECU 70 at predetermined intervals.

First, whether an exhaust temperature T_i detected by the first exhaust temperature sensor 44 is equal to or more than a predetermined value is determined at step S500. Specifically, the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are determined to be currently executed if the exhaust temperature T_i is equal to or more than the predetermined value.

If the processes are not currently executed (negative outcome at step S500), the exhaust purifying catalysts are not determined to be deactivated.

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On the other hand, if the processes are currently executed (positive outcome at step S500), it is determined at step S502 whether the difference ($T_i - T_b$) between the exhaust temperature T_i and a reference temperature T_b computed based
10 on the engine operation state has been less than a predetermined value γ for a predetermined period.

The temperature T_i is used as an indicator of the bed temperature of the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a. The
15 catalyst bed temperature in a state where fuel is not being added to exhaust gas, or in a state where no procedure for increasing the catalyst bed temperature is being executed, is used as the reference temperature T_b . Specifically, the reference temperature T_b is successively computed based on the
20 engine operation state, or the engine rotation speed NE and the fuel injection amount, which are highly correlated with the exhaust temperature.

When the temperature difference has been less than the
25 predetermined value γ for the predetermined period (positive outcome at step S502), it is determined that, even if fuel is being added to exhaust gas to increase the catalyst bed temperature, the exhaust temperature T_i is low as in a case where little fuel is burned. That is, it is determined that
30 the bed temperature of the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a is lowered. In this case, the exhaust purification catalysts are determined to be deactivated at step S504.

On the other hand, when the temperature difference is
35 equal to or more than the predetermined value γ or when the

temperature difference has been less than the predetermined value γ for a period shorter than the predetermined period (negative outcome at step S502), the exhaust purification catalysts are not determined to be deactivated.

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In this embodiment, when the duration of the ON state of the downhill flag is short (from time t_{31} to time t_{32} shown in the timing chart of Fig. 9), that is, when the vehicle has driven downhill for a short time and the exhaust purification catalysts are not likely to be deactivated, the deactivation determination described above is executed. If the exhaust purification catalysts are not determined to be deactivated, the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are continued. The time for executing the processes is maximized.

On the other hand, if the ECU 70 determines that the exhaust purification catalysts are deactivated during the execution of the processes (time t_{32}), or when the duration of the downhill driving exceeds a predetermined time and it is highly likely that the exhaust purification catalysts are deactivated (time t_{33}), the processes, which are being executed, are suspended. Therefore, above described disadvantages are avoided.

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The illustrated embodiments may be modified as follows.

In the second embodiment, the processes related to determination of deactivation may be changed. For example, while the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are executed, the exhaust purification catalysts may be determined to be deactivated if the difference ($T_o - T_i$) between the exhaust temperature T_i detected by the first exhaust temperature sensor 44 and an exhaust temperature T_o detected

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by the second exhaust temperature sensor 46 is greater than a predetermined value. In this case, a state is detected in which the bed temperature of the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a is low and the bed temperature of the catalyst on the filter 38a is high, in other words, fuel added by the fuel adding valve 68 is not burned in the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a but is burned in the filter 38a. Accordingly, the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a is determined to be deactivated.

In the illustrated embodiment, the requirements for determining that the vehicle is driving downhill include that the fuel cutoff control is being executed. Instead, the vehicle may be determined to be driving downhill when the fuel injection amount of the engine is equal to or less than a predetermined amount. Alternatively, a tilt sensor may be mounted on the vehicle, and the vehicle may be determined to be driving downhill when the tilt sensor detects that the front portion of the vehicle is lower than the rear portion.

In the illustrated embodiments, the processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control are suspended only when a predetermined period has elapsed since when the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill. The predetermined period may be varied based on the engine load and the vehicle speed SPD. Specifically, it may be configured that the lower the engine load or the higher the vehicle speed SPD, the shorter the predetermined period is set. Even if the vehicle is driving downhill, the rate of decrease of the catalyst bed temperature varies depending on the engine load (exhaust temperature) and the vehicle speed SPD (relative wind). However, according to the configuration of this modification, the predetermined period is set in accordance with the rate of decrease of the catalyst bed temperature. Therefore, the above described

disadvantages are reliably avoided.

The processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control may be
5 suspended when the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill.

In the illustrated embodiments, when the ECU 70 determines that the vehicle is not driving downhill, the
10 processes related to the PM elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur release control, which have been suspended based on the determination that the vehicle is driving downhill, may be resumed even if the resumption requirements are not satisfied. This configuration also
15 allows the above described disadvantages to be avoided when the vehicle is driving downhill.

When the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill, one to three processes among the first heating control and the
20 second heating control related to the PM elimination control and the sulfur heating control and the air-fuel ratio lowering control related to the sulfur release control may be selectively suspended. Since a relatively large amount of fuel is added to exhaust gas in the second heating control by
25 the fuel adding valve 68, addition of fuel to the exhaust purification catalysts in the deactivated state makes the disadvantages noticeable. Therefore, to eliminate the disadvantages accompanying the execution of the second heating control, at least the second heating control is preferably
30 suspended when the vehicle is determined to be driving downhill.

Also, when the vehicle is determined not to be driving downhill, one to three processes among the first heating
35 control and the second heating control related to the PM

elimination control and the sulfur heating control and the
air-fuel ratio lowering control related to the sulfur release
control may be selectively resumed. If the second heating
control is suspended, particulate matter remains on the
5 upstream end face of the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a.
When excessive, the accumulated amount of particulate matter
causes clogging of the NOx storage reduction catalyst 36a.
Also, when the excessive accumulated amount of particulate
matter is burned at a time, the catalyst bed temperature is
10 excessively increased. To reliably eliminate particulate
matter, at least the second heating control is preferably
resumed when the vehicle is determined not to be driving
downhill.

15 Step S106 of Figs. 3 and 7 may be omitted. That is, it
may be configured that the processes related to the PM
elimination control and the processes related to the sulfur
release control are not resumed even if the vehicle is
determined not to be driving downhill.

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The exhaust purifying apparatus of the present invention
may be applied to any internal combustion engine having a
configuration other than that shown in Fig. 1. That is, the
present invention may be, in any of the above presented
25 embodiments or forms that are pursuant to the embodiments,
applied to any type of exhaust purifying apparatus for an
internal combustion engine on a vehicle as long as the
apparatus has a regeneration control section that performs
heating control to supply fuel to an exhaust purification
30 catalysts to increase the catalyst bed temperature, thereby
regenerating the catalysts.